1926.
File 101..
Bolshevik Influence in Syria..

DAMASCUS

1926

BOLSHEVIK INFLUENCE IN SYRIA

REC^d 7 Feb 15
REGISTER N° 283
N° OF FILE 10/C/1
SERIAL N.

FOREIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

22nd January, 1926.

No. 12.

(E 364/180/91)

CONFIDENTIAL.

Sir,

I am directed by Secretary Sir Austen Chamberlain to transmit to you the accompanying copy of a despatch from the Acting British Agent and Consul at Jeddah reporting a recent conversation with Ibn Saud.

2. You will observe that in paragraph 2 of this despatch it is alleged that the Persian Consulate-General at Damascus is the headquarters of a Bolshevik organisation. I am to request you to furnish the Secretary of State with your observations on this point.

I am,
Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

Lancelot Oliphant.

W. A. Smart, Esq.,
His Majesty's Consul,
Damascus.

COPY.

(E 364/180/91)

No. 121.

(569).

SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL.

BRITISH AGENCY,

JEDDAH.

December 29th, 1925.

Sir,

I have the honour to report that on the afternoon of the 17th instant, whilst the negotiations for the submission of Jeddah were proceeding between the Sultan Abdul Aziz and myself he took the opportunity whilst waiting for the translators to finish their work to talk of the situation in and around the frontiers of the territory occupied by him.

2. Referring to Syria and the revolt in the Jebel Druse he stated that he had received many appeals for assistance but that he would not interfere and intended to follow the British policy in all respects as regards that part of the world. Further he stated that a great deal of Bolshevik money was being supplied to the insurgents who, though not Bolshevik themselves, were only too glad to avail themselves of the help thus afforded. He continued and under great secrecy for the British Government only to inform me that the headquarters of the Bolshevik organisation was in Damascus and carried on from the Persian Consulate General. He assured me that he was certain of this information and had received it from a most reliable source.

3. As regards Irak he stated that he had heard nothing

His Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of
State for Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Office,
London, S.W.

nothing but most favourable reports of the situation in that country and no trouble was to be feared there at present. Excluding of course tribal raids and such like which were but normal occurrences.

4. He expressed great concern for Trans-Jordan and Palestine and earnestly wishes to warn the British Government of danger from that quarter where he stated Bolshevik money and influence were gaining ground. He several times reiterated this warning and appeared most sincere.

5. As for the Yemen and Asir (Idrissi country), he stated that he was on terms of friendship with both of them but that the situation at present was uncertain and difficult. I gathered that the trouble actually is the division of the Asir between himself and the Imam Yahya but he did not enlarge on this point.

6. With reference to my telegram No. 194 of 28.12.25 he later showed a keen interest to know what actually was Sir Gilbert Clayton's mission to the Imam as practically any arrangements, other than on the southern boundary of the Yemen will vitally affect his interests in the Arabian peninsula.

7. Continuing on the general subject of Bolshevism he described a visit he had received from a Bolshevik envoy during the course of hostilities with the Sherifs in the Hejaz.

It appears that after a long discussion on various subjects the Bolshevik envoy asked the Sultan in a most direct manner "What is it you most want on earth"? Sultan Abdul Aziz explained that he was surprised at the directness of the question and for a few moments did not answer, bue eventually said "Money I suppose". The Bolshevik envoy stated that he was prepared to give him that, and what else did he want. The Sultan

then

then replied "arms and ammunition". To which the Bolshevik replied "and aeroplanes and guns also if you wish". The Sultan more and more surprised at the generosity of his visitor then replied "Yes, but what do you want from me". To which the Bolshevik replied "that of course there were certain conditions but that "he did not think the Sultan would find them "impracticable and that all he wanted was that the "Sultan should 'make trouble with the British'".

8. His Majesty the Sultan ended with again assuring me of his friendship and the correctness of his information and even went so far as to state that in case of trouble in Trans-Jordan he would assist His Majesty's Government.

9. Copies of this despatch have been sent to Palestine, Beirut and Cairo.

I have, etc.,

(Signed) S. R. Jordan.

H.B.M. VICE CONSUL,

ACTING BRITISH AGENT AND CONSUL.

WAS/JVR

REC^d
REGISTER N° 572
N° OF FILE 10/c
SERIAL N° 2

Damascus, 22nd February, 1926.

No. 76 Confidential.

Sir,

With reference to your despatch No. 12 (E 364/180/91) of the 22nd ultimo, I have the honour to report that I had already received through His Majesty's Consulate-General at Beyrout a copy of despatch No. 121 of December 29th last from the Acting British Agent at Jeddah regarding a conversation with Ibn Sa'ud.

2. I have hitherto been unable to discover any confirmation of Ibn Sa'ud 's allegation that the Persian Consulate-General here is the headquarters of a Bolshevik organisation. It would, however, be extremely difficult to obtain such information without employing paid secret agents.

3. 'Ain-ul-Mulk, the present Consul-General, has in the past always appeared as Anglophile. In Persia he co-operated during the phase of the Anglo-Persian Agreement to assist Vosough-ud-Dowleh in the execution of that policy. He obtained the post at Damascus through the help of His Majesty's Legation as a reward for his reputed Anglophile sentiments. He is a Behai, and the Behais have generally been well-disposed

His Majesty's Principal
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,
etc., etc., etc.,
Foreign Office,
LONDON.

Copies to Jerusalem 67, Bagdad 64, and Beyrout 74.

disposed towards England. On the other hand, he is corrupt, and he would probably do most things if sufficiently paid. He has a large circle of acquaintances among Arabs of lesser standing. He would no doubt be a very suitable intermediary for Bolshevik propaganda.

4. I will not fail to watch him as closely as possible and report any suspicious features of his activity here.

5. I have little doubt that Bolshevik Agents are at work in Syria, where the present situation affords an ideal opportunity for their activities. The reckless use of Christians by the French and the criminal folly of the Lebanese have succeeded at last in lighting here the fire of religious passion, now added to the older anti-French Nationalist fervour. Large numbers of the people are now unemployed as a result of the collapse of industry and commerce in this prolonged anarchy. Misery and hunger are driving even the most peaceable to desperation. It is such a situation that the Bolshevik has always hastened to exploit, for he uses impartially nationalism, religious fanaticism and economic distress.

One of those dangerously [illegible] to common [illegible] today [illegible] [illegible]

6. I would mention that some Syrians share my belief in this matter. The spread of banditism in the town, the methods of carrying off rich men for ransom, the extraordinary resistence of the normally timid townsmen, are attributed by some Syrians to Bolshevik encouragement and guidance.

I have the honour to be,
with the highest respect,
Sir,
Your most obedient,
humble servant

(signed) W.A. Smart.